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非性差別言語変革

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Nonsexist Language Reform

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性差別語の問題は近年、様々な言語において注目を浴びてきている。それまで総称的に使われてきた男性語を改正する1970年代初期の運動に始まって、英語の *he* の総称的な使い方のように焦点は言語において女性と男性の差別描写への排除の必要性へと広げられている。この間、女性と男性の両方を含む言語のガイドラインが多く書かれたが、性差別の多くは両性を含む言語の不足ではなく、言語の意味に対する力と関連していることを見落としていると批判されている。日本では1999年に女性平等性を助長するために二つの法律が承認された。同時にこれらには非性差別語変革への訴えもあったが、主に両性を含む言語への訴えで、社会における性差別の問題には充分に取り組んでいなかった。非性差別言語変革への二つの鍵は、男性や社会における高い地位のグループによって変革を支持され、性差別の社会的なより広い内容においての変革を位置付けることのようなのである。

The issue of sexist language has received increasing attention in a number of languages in recent years (see Pauwels, 1998). The current awareness of sexism in language is an outgrowth of the awareness of sexism in society that resulted from the women's liberation movement beginning in the late 1960s in the United States. The current interest in sexist language began in the English-speaking world around 1970 with the feminist attack on sex-indefinite (also called generic) *he* (the use of the pronoun *he* to refer to both men and women when no definite gender reference exists, as in the example "Anyone can do it if *he* tries.") (Bodine, 1975/1998, p. 125). Since that time, feminists in several countries have called for changes in their languages to "eliminate the discriminatory portrayal and representation of women and men in language" (Pauwels, p. 8). The aim of such efforts is a reform of the language to rid it of sexist elements, referred to as sexist language.

Key words; Nonsexist Language Reform, Gender, Sexism, Sexist Language, Women's Language

Since the 1970s, guidelines on avoiding sexist language have become quite common. In an American guidebook, *The A-Z of Non-Sexist Language*, Margaret Doyle says simply that sexist language refers to “terms and usages that exclude or discriminate against women [including the presumption] that maleness is standard, the norm, and that femaleness is non-standard, or the exception” (1995/1998, p. 149). The Australian *Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers* (as cited in Pauwels, 1998, p. 156) defines sexist language as “language that discriminates against women by not adequately reflecting their role, status and—often—very presence in society despite the increased participation of women in the work force and public life.” The German *Empfehlungen zur Vermeidung von sexistischem Sprachgebrauch in öffentlicher Sprache* [Recommendations for Avoidance of Sexist Language Use in Public Language] has this explanation:

Sexist language is language which ignores women and their achievements, . . . describes women as dependent on or submissive to men, . . . portrays women in stereotypical roles and/or addresses them only in stereotyped fashion and does not allow the portrayal of women beyond the stereotypes, . . . language which derogates and ridicules women by means of denigratory remarks (as cited and translated in Pauwels, p. 155).

Nonsexist Language Reform in European Languages

In European languages, two main strategies are used to achieve nonsexist language reform: gender neutralization and gender specification (Pauwels, 1998, p. 109). In gender neutralization, gender reference is minimized or neutralized in generic contexts (referring to both females and males) as well as in occupational nouns referring to women or men. The aim is to minimize or do away with gender-specific expressions and constructions. This is the most common strategy in most of the Germanic languages, such as English, Dutch, Danish, and Norwegian. This strategy is also used in Japanese.

In gender specification, gender reference is emphasized by means of explicit reference to both sexes in an equal and parallel manner (often by feminizing nouns; ie., having both a masculine and a feminine noun). This is the most common strategy in German, French, Italian, and Spanish. However, languages often make use of a combination of both strategies. The existence of separate honorific titles for men and women in English, despite the introduction of *Ms.*, is an example of gender specification, in contrast to the gender-unspecified general honorific title *-san* in Japanese (however, Nakayama [as cited in Pauwels, 1998, p. 28] has found that Japanese newspapers tend to use *-san* in a gender-specific way by frequently referring to men by their

family name plus *-san* and women by their first name plus *-san*). In the case of Japanese, there exist a number of gender-specific nouns made through the addition of kanji characters meaning “female,” (and to a lesser extent characters meaning “male”), but they rarely refer to “both sexes in an equal and parallel manner” (cf. “joshi daisei” 女子大生 [female college student] and “daigakusei” 大学生 [generic college student]). Nouns referring to men are generally considered generic (cf. “isha” 医者 [generic and male doctor], but “joi” 女医 [woman doctor]).

Pauwels (1998, p. 230) cites four areas of language that usually contribute to sexism and are common targets for reform in English:

(a) Generic reference to human beings (nouns, pronouns, grammatical number, and gender agreement). Examples are replacing *man/men* with *human/humans* or *people*; *mankind* with *human-kind*; *brotherhood* with *brother and sisterhood* or *fellowship*; *he* with *he or she*, *s/he*, *he/she*, *she or he*, singular *they*, or changing the noun to plural and using *they*. In a survey of American newspapers and magazines covering the period 1971–1979, Cooper (as cited in Pauwels, 1998, p. 200) found that generic *man* was most often replaced by a gender-neutral alternative, while generic *he* also showed some decrease in use. Cooper found that changing the noun to plural was more common in the publications surveyed than the other alternatives mentioned above.

(b) Nomenclature for men and women in relation to occupations, professions, offices, and related positions (mainly nouns). Examples are compounds with *-man* (e.g., *chairman* is replaced with *chairperson* or *chair*; *policeman* with *police officer*; *mail(post)man* with *mail carrier*; *fireman* with *fire fighter*, etc.

In the case of occupations that have been traditionally associated with men, the gender specification strategy yields “feminized” job nomenclature with the words *woman* or *female* (e.g., *woman/female doctor*, *lawyer*, *mechanic*, etc.). Gender neutralization can also result in use of the traditional job name without reference to gender (e.g., *doctor*, *lawyer*, *mechanic*, etc.), or the switch to a new gender-neutral name (e.g., *steward* and *stewardess* are replaced with *flight attendant*, and *waiter* and *waitress* with *server*). Finally, in some cases where there is traditionally both a male and female noun, the female noun is replaced by the male noun (e.g., *actress* replaced by *actor* [this seems to be especially the case among women in the profession, rather than among the general public], or the by now old-fashioned sounding word *aviatrix* replaced by *aviator*).

Among occupations traditionally associated with women, gender specification leads to “masculinized” nomenclature with the word *male* (but rarely *man*, unlike the addition of *woman* in the reverse case). The following brief sample of occupations traditionally associated with women is a good illustration in itself of sexism in society: *male nurse*; *male teacher* (especially in

elementary schools), *male prostitute*, and *male stripper*. A different type of gender specification is the addition of *-husband* to express the male equivalent of *housewife* (*househusband*), which itself can be gender neutralized with the word *homemaker* (although *homemaker* seems to be used exclusively for women). Finally, as with occupations traditionally associated with men, the traditional job name can be used without reference to gender (e.g., *nurse* and *teacher*) in a process of gender neutralization.

(c) Stereotyped portrayal of the sexes at word, sentence, and discourse level. For example, women are traditionally thought of and spoken of as sexual beings, in physical terms, or in terms of fashion. In addition, there is an asymmetrical use of *boy*, which refers only to young males, *girl*, which is often used to refer to both female children and adults, and *lady* and *gentleman* (see below).

(d) Titles and other forms of address for women and men and human agent nouns for women and men. This includes the introduction of *Ms.* as a parallel to *Mr.* (marital status unstated in both cases), the replacement in business letters of *Dear Sir* with *Dear Madam or Sir*, or *Dear Sir or Madam*, and the asymmetrical use of compounds with *-girl* and *-lady* (e.g., *salesgirl*, *saleslady*, and *salesman*, but not **sales boy/gentleman*.) Gender neutralization produces *salesperson*, *salesclerk*, and simply *clerk*.

Arguments over the Nature of Sexism and Its Relation to Nonsexist Language Reform

It should not be surprising that women in general do not agree on the need for nonsexist language reform, nor is there agreement even among feminists on the precise nature of sexism and the best way to approach nonsexist language reform (see Uchida, 1992/1998). For example, both Doyle (1995/1998) and Pauwels (1998) stress that, as Pauwels puts it, “men are considered the norm for the human species: their characteristics, thoughts, beliefs and actions are viewed as fully and adequately representing those of all humans, male and female” (p. 229). Pauwels claims that this is the cause of “the invisibility of women in language” (p. 229). On the other hand, Cameron (1995/1998, p. 160), while not explicitly disagreeing with the idea of women’s invisibility, sees the problem as “not that some people remain unaware of our existence, [but] that they choose not to acknowledge it, or (just as often) to disparage it.”

Cameron is, in fact, a very eloquent critic of most of the writers of nonsexist language guidelines such as Doyle. She faults them for their failure to see that sexism is not a lack of inclu-

siveness but “a systemic relation of power, as opposed to a set of misguided beliefs and stereotypes about men and women” (1995/1998, p. 161). Cameron argues that if sexism were simply a matter of including women and men equally, English expressions such as “women and children first” (associated with sinking ships) would be understood merely as discriminating against men. However, if sexism is understood to be a political issue (i.e., as “systemic relation of power”) then “women and children first” is a sexist expression because “it belongs to a patriarchal discourse in which men are there to ‘protect’ women and children –the women and children being by implication men’s property, men’s to control” (p. 161). Cameron cautions that:

If you do not explain to people what the *political* rationale is for identifying certain ways of using language as ‘sexist’, they may stick to the letter of your prescriptions, but they will disregard the spirit. They will think, or pretend to think, that the problem is not to do with meaning or content, but simply consists of a few isolated forms like ‘man’ and the solution is to mechanically change every occurrence of these forms irrespective of the context (this is the source of all those side-splitting examples like ‘personagement’ [for management]). (p. 163)

An article spotlighting anticipated nonsexist Japanese language reforms in the wake of the enactment of the revised Equal Employment Opportunity Law in April 1999 is illustrative of this point (Shimizu, 1999). Cameron would applaud the article for making clear that nonsexist language reform involves more than changing isolated words and expressions, such as job titles, and must also include changing the mind-set reflected in the language. One example given is a sexist phrase used by males to tease other males who are not acting “masculine” enough, “onna no kusatta yatsu” [literally “a rotten female”], which the article confirms will have to be banished along with “otoko rashiku” [like a man]. The article also points out that there are things that can no longer be said in the workplace, such as “onna ni wa makaserarenai” [we can’t depend on a woman to do it], or “otoko no kuse ni darashi ga nai” [loosely, “you don’t act like a man should act”].

However, the same article also illustrates Cameron’s criticism of the way that sexism is misunderstood. The article appears in the *Asahi Shoogakusei Shimbun*, a daily put out by the major national daily *Asahi Shimbun* aimed at children in Japanese elementary schools. It is framed as a conversation between the reporter and a boy whose mother has scolded him for not acting “like a boy” (“otoko no ko rashiku”). The reporter admonishes the boy: “女の子もきちんとしなければいけないわけだから、「男の子らしく」はへんだよね。だから、そういうヘンない方もやめようということだ” [Since girls have to do the right thing, too, don’t you think ‘acting like a boy’ is

strange, so we ought to stop using such strange ways of talking]. On the surface, the reporter is correct that such concepts as boys acting “boyish” and girls acting “girlish” should go. However, in another sense, the above statement puts responsibility for nonsexist language reform as much on women as on men (“since girls have to do the right thing, too . . .”). In fairness to the author, he is probably referring to the type of “equality” that he thinks is embodied in the revised law. However, he can be faulted for appearing to forget that sexism is fundamentally something that women suffer, not men. In addition, another reading of the article could easily lead to the interpretation that responsibility for change lies more with women than with men, since it is the mother who urges her son to act according to traditional gender roles, while her husband expresses a more progressive attitude. Further, when the boy asks the reporter if men are also discriminated against, the reporter implies that they are by citing titles of traditionally female occupations that will change under the revised law.

The reporter seems to be making the same mistake that Cameron (1995/1998, p. 161) criticizes guideline writers for making; namely, thinking that “inclusive language” and “nonsexist language” are interchangeable terms; that sexism is a lack of inclusiveness. The report also seems to be guilty of viewing sexism as “a set of misguided beliefs and stereotypes about men and women” rather than as “a systemic relation of power” (p. 161). In a sense, explaining sexist language to a child as “a set of misguided beliefs and stereotypes about men and women” may seem more reasonable than trying to explain how it relates to the dynamic of power between men and women, but if the Japanese nonsexist language reform debate were to remain at the level of “misguided beliefs and stereotypes,” it would be safe to say that it would be a comparatively “childish” approach to an “adult” problem.

“Political Correctness”

Cameron argues that “the point of non-sexist language is not to change the forms of words for the sake of it but to change the repertoire of meanings a language conveys. It’s about redefining rather than merely renaming the world” (1995/1998, p. 161). This obviously makes nonsexist language reform a political issue, in the sense that the movement for reform has, as Cameron puts it, “in effect forced everyone who uses English to declare a position in respect of gender, race or whatever. . . . Choice has altered the value of the terms and removed the option of political neutrality” (1995, p. 119). This is probably true of any language where nonsexist (and nonracist, etc.) language reform has been proposed.

As a result of this politization, the “smear-term” (Cameron, 1995/1998, p. 158) *political correctness* (PC) is commonly employed today to disparage or dismiss attempts at what Cameron calls “politically-motivated linguistic reform” (p. 158). In his pioneering sociolinguistic study, Labov (as cited in Ehrlich and King, 1992/1998, p. 167) argued that linguistic change will not take hold if it does not originate with the highest-status group (whether in socioeconomic terms or in terms of another measure of prestige) in the speech community. He also found that the highest-status group “eventually stigmatized the changed form through their control of various institutions of the communication network” (p. 167), which today is usually by accusing the changed form or the reformer of being “politically correct.” When the media pick up news of nonsexist language reform, such reforms are frequently termed “politically correct recommendations,” or “the latest contribution to the debate about ‘political correctness,’” as was the case in a Reuter news report on the publication of Margaret Doyle’s *The A-Z of Non-Sexist Language* (“Nonsexist Dictionary,” 1995). In the Reuter example, these two references to PC are made in spite of the fact that Doyle herself is quoted in the article as saying that “[political correctness] is now little more than a ‘useful (though wildly misapplied) label for ridiculing an opposing viewpoint.” In addition to labeling nonsexist language reforms with this incendiary sobriquet, media coverage also tends to trivialize the suggested reforms. The Reuter report on Doyle’s guidebook, for example, opens with this sensational information: “‘Manhole’ is out. Use ‘sewer access hole’ or ‘sewer opening’. ‘Abominable snowman’ is frowned upon. Please refer to ‘abominable snow creature’.”

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the sometimes overzealous attempts of nonsexist language guideline writers such as Doyle to concoct gender neutral terms for mundane words such as *manhole* may leave those attempts open to a certain amount of ridicule. As a result, critics often twist and distort such attempts into ridiculous coinages (e.g., “personagement”) that unsuspecting people take to be serious nonsexist or nondiscriminatory language reforms (cf. the spate of *-challenged* parodies of the attempt to reform *handicapped*, e.g., *vertically challenged* for *tall*). Sorrels (1983) calls these strange expressions illustrations of “the lengths to which some people go to sabotage the movement toward language nonsexism. They deliberately alienate receivers by leaving the impression that all nonsexist passages are necessarily clumsy and stupid” (p. 27).

There is a Japanese example of this in the cartoon accompanying the *Asahi Shogakusei Shim-bun* article (Shimizu, 1999), which shows a father reading out loud to his wife and son some examples in the newspaper of male-specific words that will not be used anymore. The little boy

starts to say “kasan” [mom] but catches himself and instead asks, “母さんもいけないのか” [Is “mom” out, too?]. His mother then turns to her husband and says, “それはいいよね” [That’s still all right, isn’t it?], to which the father gives a somewhat puzzled “ウム” [mmm]. By portraying the adults as being a bit confused about the implications of social and linguistic change, the cartoon presents an amusing, but telling example of the effect that nonsexist (and any nondiscriminatory) language change can have on ordinary speakers of a language. It is also possible that the cartoonist is making a subtle criticism of the reform, a Japanese version of labeling reform as political correctness.

Cameron (1995) points out that “objections to linguistic reform tend to focus much more on *language* than on the social questions at issue, such as whether women are men’s equals. It is ‘perverting language’ and ‘reading things into words’ which attract opposition and which are parodied” (p. 119). It could just as easily be argued, for example in the case of *manhole*, that because employment patterns have changed, and women are now performing jobs, such as entering “*manholes*,” that were once done exclusively by men, it is logical to find a new term to reflect this changed social reality. Whether or not “sewer access hole” or “sewer opening” or something else is an acceptable alternative to a majority of English speakers, the fact is that if one of the new terms took hold, in time it would tend to “sound” just as natural—and unassailable—as *manhole* now sounds to those who find any attempt to reform it misguided, if not ludicrous.

“Onna Kotoba” and “Women’s Language”

Another area of disagreement among feminist linguists concerns the nature of “women’s language” (Bergvall, 1999), specifically the question of whether men and women have different ways of talking and what this means. In the English-speaking world, the so-called *difference approach* arose in the 1970s and 1980s as a way to counter the centuries-old notion that women’s speech styles were inferior to men’s. Research based on this approach claimed that women were better conversationalists and better at seeking rapport and collaboration, whereas men’s speech was characterized by competition and “one-upmanship” (p. 277). This divergence was explained in terms of differences in the ways males and females are socialized beginning on playgrounds as children and continuing into adulthood.

However, difference does not mean equality, and critics of the *difference approach* have argued that to emphasize differences downplays the fact that society does not value women’s language as highly as men’s. In addition, the fact that many *difference approach* studies were largely based

on the speech of white, middle-class women has been criticized (Bergvall, 1999, p. 278), and a new emphasis on diversity has arisen; namely, the recognition that gender is not a monolithic concept, but more like a continuum of practices that do not always fit neatly within previous generalizations concerning “women’s language” or “men’s language.” This new approach, called the *communities of practice (CofP) approach*, assumes “variability in gendered practices and identities,” emphasizing “the acts of becoming gendered” (p. 278). This makes it possible to look at nuances within such categories as “women,” “men,” “girls,” and “boys.” The *CofP approach* recognizes that with the movement of women into the work force and into public life, traditional roles have been called into question, which has made gender differences extremely complex. Bergvall concludes that “at the end, it may be that the only truly global generalizations are that gender is a point of differentiation in societies, reflected in and constructed through language” (p. 289). The key point to understand, however, is that gender is a social construct. As Uchida (1998/1992, p. 291) has noted, if the words *sex* and *gender* are used precisely, *sex* refers to a biological category, whereas *gender* is a sociocultural category, “man-made” and socially constructed. As such, *gender* is much more open to variability than *sex*.

It would be hard to argue with the idea that gender is a social construct in Japanese society, “reflected in and constructed through language” (Bergvall, 1999, p. 289). The concept of separate men’s and women’s speech is a strongly embedded cultural myth. Non-Japanese men married to Japanese women are often made aware of the fact that they have unconsciously picked up certain features of women’s speech from their wives. Okamoto (1995, p. 298) notes that the areas of difference that are most often cited include self-reference (words for “I”), address terms (words for “you,” etc.), sentence-final particles, honorifics, pitch range, and intonation. Qualities often ascribed to Japanese women’s speech, in contrast to Japanese men’s speech, include being more polite, gentle, soft-spoken, nonassertive, and empathetic. Similar to most cultural myths, it is true that, in general, there are many features that are different in the ways Japanese women and men use language, but the cultural roots of these differences may not be as deep, nor the differences as universal, as many people believe.

Ide and Terada (1998) have pointed out that the historical origins of Japanese women’s speech can be traced back to “nyoobo-kotoba” (court ladies’ speech) and “yuujogo” (“play-lady” speech). “Nyoobo-kotoba” probably originated in the 11th century but was not widely recognized by the public until the Edo Period when a spate of women’s etiquette books were published, such as *Fujin Yashinaigusa* (The Book for Bringing Up Ladies) (1689) and *Onna Chohooki* (Hand Dictionary of Women’s Etiquette) (1692). Also in the Edo Period, Confucian-

ism, with its basic ideology of men's predominance over women as exemplified in the expression "dan-son, jo-hi" (men superior, women inferior) (Reynolds, 1991), had started to permeate Japanese society. This justified the need for women to behave differently from men and contributed to the popularity of women's etiquette books. "Nyooobo-kotoba" came to be acknowledged and supported by the public as the elegant, sophisticated, and ideal way of speaking for women, regardless of their social class and occupation (Ide & Terada, p. 146).

"Yuuujogo" was the special way of speaking used by "play ladies," or courtesans, in the pleasure quarters during the Edo Period (roughly 1600–1868). Despite the low social status of these women, they were "generally respected by the masses for their discipline, talent, and beauty" and even "idolized especially among young women as next-door role models," which gave their way of speaking "a certain covert prestige" (Ide & Terada, 1998, p. 151). The fact that play ladies came in contact with the general public far more than the court ladies who used "nyooobo-kotoba" and the "prosperity of popular culture in big cities" (p. 150) both fostered the spread of "yuuujogo" among the general public. It became recognized and used by ordinary women of the time as a reflection of "their image of ideal women" and a "womanly way of speaking" (p. 152).

Still later, in the Meiji Period (1868–1912), the use of "women's language" was particularly encouraged as part of the standardization of Japanese, which may be one reason that there seem to be fewer gender differences in regional dialects than in the standard dialect (Okamoto, 1995, p. 308). The promotion of "women's language" in the Meiji Period was also an attempt to "discipline women according to the ideal of *ryoosai kenbo* 'good wife and wise mother'" (p. 309). From this legacy comes the "culturally and ideologically constructed, both class-related and normative" (p. 309) ideal of the "onna rashii" (feminine) Japanese woman. Okamoto calls Japanese women's language "a reflection of the dominant gender ideologies embedded, even today, in Japanese culture and society" (p. 309).

Reynolds (1991) agrees and adds that

the female/male speech dichotomy stands in obvious contradiction to the new (postwar) social order based on egalitarian ideology. . . language use reflects Japanese society of the past, in which women were viewed as the inferior, weaker sex and were expected to talk accordingly. Women may perceive themselves as equals of men but women's language calls up the older image of women. (pp. 129–130)

She asserts that the Japanese female/male speech dichotomy (specifically, assertive styles for men and nonassertive/polite styles for women) is not "a mere differentiation of the two sexes but it reflects the structure of a society where women were defined as the inferior sex," and con-

cludes that this dichotomy is destined to change, “just as the traditional role division based on sex has been fluctuating widely in various aspects of social life” (p. 141).

The middle and upper class (and “special” class) origins of Japanese women’s speech (Kitagawa [as cited in Okamoto, 1995, p. 308] also points out that gender differences in speech are more of an urban phenomenon than a rural one), its connection with the standard dialect, and the relatively recent appearance of this distinction in the long history of Japan are important reasons for considering Japanese women’s speech in terms of the *CofP approach* to gender and language rather than the *difference approach*. Many commentators, from the popular media to serious scholars (see Okamoto, 1995; Jorden, 1991; Reynolds, 1991) have noted that younger Japanese women tend to use more “masculine” language today. In addition, men often use language that is considered “feminine,” especially when talking to women (Mizutani & Mizutani, 1987, p. 77). Okamoto (p. 300) faults previous research for resorting to “overgeneralizations based on the static dichotomous categories of *women’s language and men’s language*—an approach that tends to represent and reinforce stereotypes or linguistic norms.” It has been suggested that the perception that women are now talking more like men and vice versa may represent a “shift in cultural stereotypes” (p. 318) whereby younger Japanese women do not consider so-called moderately masculine forms to be masculine at all. This observation points up another important point when considering traditional Japanese “women’s language”; namely, that “the speech styles of Japanese women are diverse” (p. 317) and that generational differences are also important. Looked at from a *CofP* perspective,

Japanese women’s speech styles reflect their understanding of themselves as certain kinds of Japanese women (e.g., young unmarried women, homemakers, managers) interacting in specific contexts. Thus, gender cannot be viewed in the abstract, as independent of identity and relationships. Rather, gender and other social attributes jointly and interactively construct women’s identities and their relationships, thereby affecting their choice of speech styles. (p. 312)

Thus, in the study of gender and the Japanese language, an approach that sees gender as a variable social construct seems not only warranted, but necessary. In fact, the few studies (Okamoto, 1995, p. 299) that have looked at variation in Japanese female speech patterns have found “great variations” (p. 307). Okamoto herself goes so far as to assert that “it is uncertain to what extent the label *Japanese women’s language* reflects the actual language practices of Japanese women” (p. 309).

The Prospects for Nonsexist Language Reform in Japanese

On June 15, 1999, the lower house of the Japanese Diet unanimously passed the “basic law on joint participation by men and women in society” (“Diet Approves Bill,” 1999). According to the Kyodo News English translation, the new law states that “people should seek a society in which both men and women are given equal chances to participate in social activities ‘in all fields of their own choosing’, and where they enjoy benefits and share responsibility equally.” Kyodo News describes the new law as giving women “a much-needed legal boost to move ahead in Japan’s male-dominated society,” but notes that the law does not address the issues of the salary gap between men and women and the lack of promotion opportunities for women.

Another problem facing Japanese women seeking full-time employment was reported less than two weeks earlier in an article translated from the *Yomiuri Shimbun* (“Gender Bias,” 1999). According to the article, a report from the Study Group of Women and News Media found that in 1996 only 26 percent of job advertisements offered full-time employment to women. The article points out that these figures “reflect the poor employment situation for women before the revised Equal Employment Opportunity Law” took effect in April 1999. Before the law was revised, it was legal for firms to advertise for “women only” or “men only.” However, another article translated from the *Yomiuri Shimbun* (“Revised Equal Opportunity Law,” 1999) cited the case of a company training seminar for women that had dropped “women” from the seminar name, although it continued to hold the seminar with female participants only. The reason the company gave was that there was no time before the law took effect to change the content of the seminar, which dealt with “‘serving tea, working as a receptionist and answering phone calls’.” As a result, the article cautioned that “changes may be cosmetic ones.”

As we have seen, Labov (as cited in Ehrlich and King, 1992/1998, p. 167) has argued that linguistic change will not take hold if it does not originate with the highest-status group in the speech community, or, as Ehrlich and King have claimed, unless “high-status subgroups within a speech community adopt non-sexist values” (p. 167). The enactment of two major laws to promote the equal participation of women in society within a span of less than three months in 1999 may show that some members of the highest-status group in Japanese society, the government—the male establishment, are willing to consider change in women’s social status. While optimism that meaningful social and linguistic change will be more than cosmetic is premature, necessary conditions for reform may exist, according to Labov’s model.

The *Asahi Shoogakusei Shimbun* article cited above (Shimizu, 1999) offers some evidence of support for nonsexist language reform of Japanese by one high-status (or at least influential) subgroup in Japanese society, the media, and, moreover, in an article written by a man. More than a simple news article, a full-page is devoted to explaining what the revised Equal Employment Opportunity Law would mean once enacted in April 1999. Interestingly, the article focuses heavily on words that would need to be changed in the workplace because of the new law. Written for children, the article uses direct and unambiguous language to describe the prescribed changes: “. . . などのことばは使えない” [you can’t use. . . , and other words], “女性を差別することばもゆるされなくなる” [words that discriminate against women will no longer be tolerated], and (in one of the sub-headlines) “使ってはダメなことばを決める” [words that we mustn’t use have been decided].

Centering language reform in “the context of a larger sociopolitical initiative whose primary goal is the eradication of sexist practices” (Ehrlich & King, 1992/1998, p. 170) seems to be another factor in determining the success of the reform. It is, therefore, interesting that the article introduces the language reforms in the broader context of the social changes that enactment of the revised law will bring about. This approach potentially enhances the chances that the nonsexist language reforms will be accepted. For example, the article frames the issue in terms of traditional gender roles in society. One of the subheadlines proclaims: “男らしく女らしくはヘン” [‘acting like a man’ and ‘acting like a woman’ are strange]. The article opens with a hypothetical exchange between “Q-chan,” an elementary school-age boy, and the reporter, Mr. Shimizu. The fact that the reporter is a man, a member of a “high-status subgroup” in society, is significant, as well as that the child, to whom the reporter is advocating social as well as linguistic change, is male. The little boy is confused because of what his father said when his mother scolded him for not acting “like a boy”: “男らしくや女らしくということばは、もう職場では使えないんだよ” [In the workplace we don’t use words like ‘acting like a man’ and ‘acting like a woman’ anymore, you know]. The father’s statement may be naive or idealistic or both, but it serves as a convenient starting point for the reporter to explain the impending nonsexist language reforms.

In actuality, Japanese parents may not have as gender egalitarian ideals as this father. While 85% of Tokyo teachers in 1991 supported the promotion of “danjo byoodoo” 男女平等 [male/female equality] and “danjo kyoosei” 男女共生 [male/female coexistence], in 1997 nearly half (45.6%) of Tokyo parents still thought girls should be brought up to be feminine and boys to be manly, according to an international survey (“Report Warns Schools,” 1997). This was the

second highest percentage after South Korea (55.2%) and ahead of the 36.4% in the Philippines, 28.2% in the United States, 24.1% in France, 15.8% in Britain, 14.8% in Germany, and 6.3% in Sweden. Perhaps more significantly, Tokyo parents had the lowest percentage (38.8%) saying both girls and boys should be brought up in the same way, compared to 42.4% in Korea, 62.2% in France, 63.3% in the Philippines, 66.4% in the U.S., 70.8% in Germany, 79% in Britain, and 89.2% in Sweden. Yamada (1997, p. 129) explains the more positive evaluation of the concepts of “onnarashii” [femininity] and “otokorashii” [masculinity] in Japanese society as being a result of greater same-gender interaction in Japan, which encourages gender-specific behavior. “Tokyo Josei Hakusho 97” [Tokyo Women’s White Paper 97] accused education at school and at home of reinforcing gender stereotyping (“Report Warns Schools,” 1997). The white paper claimed that there is an overemphasis on the importance of conforming to traditional notions of masculinity and femininity. The paper noted that in addition to teacher attitudes and the depiction of women in textbooks, how parents raise their children is also an important influence on young people’s gender values.

Conclusion

We have seen that there are a few hopeful signs of a degree of reform of sexist language in Japan, although optimism that reforms will actually succeed seems premature. As the debate over the nature of “women’s language” in both English and Japanese shows, a static view of gender that does not take into account the variability of both the way the concept of gender is constructed and the way women and men use language in gendered ways may lead to a perpetuation of the status quo, whereby women’s language is seen as less powerful (and less equal) than men’s. Such a situation would call for even stronger efforts at nonsexist language reform, presuming that successful nonsexist language reform would, in turn, contribute to a more balanced view of gender as a social construct and as it is reflected in language.

As we have seen, another important factor, the support of people in the linguistic environment who have higher status than women, cannot be overlooked. However, as Ehrlich and King (1992/1998, p. 167) have pointed out, when reforms are carried out by lower-status groups without the full support of those with higher status, “there is much evidence to suggest that innovative, non-sexist linguistic forms do undergo a kind of depreciation” resulting in misinterpretation and misuse.

One such example is the English honorific title *Ms.* Originally coined by feminists in the

1970s to serve as a parallel term to *Mr.*, it was intended to refer to women in general rather than separating women into those married (*Mrs.*) and those not married (*Miss*). In fact, today its use has become much more common, but oddly enough, it is also being used in ways that have nothing to do with “the elimination of gender inequality in language and the creation of a language capable of portraying the sexes as different but equal” (Pauwels, 1998, p. 139). The main problem seems to be that both women and men misinterpret *Ms.* as either an alternative for *Miss* or as an additional title to *Mrs.* and *Miss*. For example, Graddol and Swann (as cited in Pauwels, 1998, p. 218) pointed out that many official forms in Britain listed only *Mrs.* and *Ms.* as choices for women, in effect replacing *Miss* with *Ms.* and defeating the purpose of this linguistic reform, while Penelope (as cited in Pauwels, p. 218) claimed a similar misinterpretation of *Ms.* in the United States. In Canada, Atkinson (as cited in Ehrlich & King, 1992/1998, p. 168) found that many women used *Mrs.* for married women, *Miss* for women who had never been married, and *Ms.* for divorced women. In Australia, Pauwels (as cited in Pauwels, 1998, p. 218) found a similar three-way distinction, but, in addition, other factors besides marital status were found in the usage of *Ms.* For example, *Ms.* was found to be used by feminists (ideological orientation), by wage earning women in white collar positions (professional status), by modern, trendy women (lifestyle), and by lesbians (sexual orientation).

It is hard to judge men’s use of *Ms.*, because, as Pauwels (1998, p. 219) says, there is “really no more than anecdotal evidence” that suggests (in Australia) a “continuing reluctance to use ‘Ms’ when addressing women.” However, as a man who addresses most women as “Ms.” rather than “Mrs.” or “Miss,” especially in writing, which seems to be a general trend in the use of nonsexist language (Pauwels, p. 214), it seems to me that in the future more research on men’s use of nonsexist language is needed.

Something similar seems to have occurred in relation to the substitution of *-person* for *-man* in words such as *chairman/chairperson* and *spokesman/spokesperson*. Studies of publications in the United States, Canada, and Australia show that certain *-person* compounds, especially *chairperson* and *spokesperson*, are used primarily to refer to women rather than men (Pauwels, 1998, p. 219). For example, men remain “chairmen,” while women are now often referred to as “chairpersons.”

Pauwels (1998, p. 218) notes the irony in the fact that the point of the nonsexist language reform that resulted in *Ms.* was to eliminate multiple honorific titles for women, but the reality is that today there is still only one major honorific title for men in English but now three rather than two for women! Ehrlich and King (1992, 1998, p. 168) see in the current misuse of *Ms.* a demonstration of “the high premium placed on identifying women by their relationship (current

or otherwise) to men, in spite of the intended neutrality associated with *Ms.*,” a rather clear illustration of Cameron’s insight (1995/1998, p. 161) that the point of nonsexist language is to change and redefine the meanings that a language expresses, not just to rename things. Until society, meaning both women and men, accepts the idea that it is no longer necessary nor desirable to identify women through their relationship to men, then attempts at nonsexist language reforms will “be appropriated by a culture and community still hostile, or at least indifferent, to the ideology associated with the reforms” (Pauwels, 1998, p. 221). At worst, as Cameron warns (as cited in Pauwels, p. 221), “in the mouths of sexists, language can always be sexist.” The key seems to be to ground the nonsexist language reform within a larger social context. As Ehrlich and King (1992/1998, p. 170) have stressed, “When language reform occurs within the context of a larger sociopolitical initiative whose primary goal is the eradication of sexist practices, it is more likely to succeed.”

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